

John 14

## Love and Commandment

Fred Rogers was the kind and gentle man who became a household name through his TV show *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

For thirty years Rogers began his show by walking through a door exchanging his sport coat for the same button down cardigan sweater and singing to his audience a song that ended "Won't you be my neighbor?"

Mr. Rogers had a way of inviting you and welcoming you into his world. And he also had a way of teaching and imparting lessons about life, how to treat one another, how to deal with feelings, through puppets and other means while also conveying in all sincerity that he loved you just the way you are.

Rogers attended seminary and he told this story about a life-changing experience during he had during his seminary days.

Years ago my wife and I were worshipping in a little church with friends of ours. We were on vacation, and I was in the middle of my homiletics (preaching) course at the time. During the sermon I kept ticking off every mistake I thought the preacher – he must have been eighty years old – was making.

When this interminable sermon that seemed to go on forever finally ended, I turned to one of my friends, intending to say something critical about the sermon.

I stopped myself when I saw the tears running down her face.

She whispered to me, "He said exactly what I needed to hear." That was really a life changing experience for me. I was judging and she was needing. And the Holy Spirit responded to need, not judgment.

We must always give God our best effort, whether in ministry or  
in whatever we do in life,  
but we must never forget that the Holy Spirit can work through even  
the most faulty instrument.

Every Christian is a faulty instrument.  
Beginning with the first twelve disciples Jesus chose on down the line  
through the centuries to you and me,  
Jesus chooses faulty instruments,  
to receive the love of God and follow his teachings.

The effort is ours to give.  
The life-long process of transformation that forms and shapes us  
into the image of Christ  
and the results of our efforts comes from God.

That's why Jesus talks to his disciples and to us about both  
keeping his commandments and loving him all in one breath.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments" he said.  
"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them,  
and we will come to them and make our home with them."

Notice how 'love' precedes 'commandments' in Jesus' words.  
"If you love me, you will keep my commandments" he said.

The love of God revealed in His good Creation and in the call of Israel  
to be His people,  
The love of God the Father glorified by His Son  
through his atoning death on the Cross,  
The love of God that precedes us and pursues us,  
is the reason we return God's love by keeping His commandments.

Loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and breath.  
Loving our neighbors as ourselves through the keeping  
of his commandments.

We can only live in fellowship with him by loving him  
and keeping his commandments.

Without the love of Christ our Christian life will become restricted,  
judgmental and self-serving leading to condemnation of ourselves  
and others.

Without the truth of Christ's words and the keeping of his commandments  
we will fashion idols of our own making,  
make up our own standards of ethical and moral behavior and  
look to our own emotions and thought and feelings  
as the measuring stick of love.

The best description of God's loving nature and his relentless desire  
to lead us back home to Himself that I have ever come across  
is from John Calvin who wrote:

"Blessings from heaven come down to us unceasingly  
like drops of water from a fountain  
that lead us through streams back to the fountain itself." (repeat)

Jesus did not earn his Father's love by doing what he did on earth.  
He magnified the love between the Father and the Son by what he did.

This past week one of the little girls named Abigail at the preschool  
where Stephanie teaches Christian Education asked her:

"Mrs. 'H', how do we get to heaven?"  
She answered, "We have to die."  
"*I know*" Abigail said "but how do we *get there*?"  
"Well, I'm not sure but I think God sends his angels or even Jesus to get us."  
Now Abigail became frustrated and shook her head,  
"*I know* but how do we *get there*?"  
Finally, Stephanie said, "Jesus comes and carries us."  
That put a big smile on Abigail's face.  
"OK" she said and went back about her business.

We will not enter into and enjoy the blessings of the Kingdom of God  
by attempting to keep God's commandments on our own efforts  
alone.

We will not enter into and enjoy the blessings of the Kingdom of God  
if we do not attempt to keep God's commandments.

That's why God sent the Holy Spirit.

We must rely on the grace, the comfort, the guidance, the power, the truth, of the Holy Spirit to bring us through this life and even carry us back on streams of living water to the fountain who is the source of eternal life and love.

We cannot grow in Christ's love without keeping his commandments.  
We cannot keep his commandments without relying on his love.

Our efforts to keep God's commandments makes us mindful daily of our inability to fully keep them and our need for God's love.

Thankfully, God's love does not hinge on ours.  
The abundance of our love does not increase His.  
The lack of our love does not diminish His.  
Our goodness does not enhance His love, nor does our weakness dilute it.  
God loves us simply because He has chosen to do so.  
He loves us when we don't feel lovely.  
He loves us when no one else loves us.  
The love of God is born from within Him, not from what He finds in us.  
(Max Lucado, God's Promises for You)

Mr. Rogers wrapped up every show with the upbeat song  
"It's such a good feeling to know you're alive."

Yes, it is.  
With the One who defeated death to give us new life.  
And by the Holy Spirit who empowers us to live our new life.  
In a community of believers sharing the blessings of new life.